2026 TOWN ELECTIONS — NEWS

13 YEARS OF DATA, ONE SATURDAY: Takeaways from Winchester's override vote and the races that surrounded it

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

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What can you take away from the March 21 townwide election? Here's what Winchester News thinks.
WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/PETER CASEY

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Winchester News reviewed precinct-level election results from every annual town election since 2014 — 13 years of data covering turnout, ballot questions, Select Board races, School Committee contests and Planning Board results — and compared them against the March 21 preliminary numbers.

The 2026 results have not yet been certified by Town Clerk MaryEllen Marshall, but are not expected to change materially. What follows are takeaways from that review.

1) The override was the main event, and almost nobody sat it out.

Of 4,876 ballots cast, 4,823 voters weighed in on the override question — just 53 left it blank. Compare that with the Select Board race, where 913 voters (18.7%) didn't bother filling in a choice, and School Committee, where 869 (17.8%) left that line empty.

Whatever else brought people to the polls, almost every one of them came with an opinion on the $11.5 million question.

2) Highest raw turnout in at least 13 years.

The 4,876 ballots cast March 21 surpassed every annual town election going back to 2014. The next closest was 2019, when 4,773 voters showed up for a contested Select Board race and a ballot question. The override drove people out.

3) Precinct 4 lost the override by two votes — 333 to 331.

Two voters. In a precinct where Select Board Chair Michelle Prior won 420-145 and John Bellaire edged out Heather von Mering 276-271, the override landed on a knife's edge. No other precinct was remotely that clo

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If the yes campaign had knocked on one more block in Precinct 4, the overall margin might have been 289 instead of 293, but the symbolism of a two-vote loss in a single precinct captures how tight the fault line was.

4) Precinct 5 was the epicenter of the no vote — and the most independent-minded precinct on the ballot.

Precinct 5 rejected the override 397-224 (63.9% no), the widest margin of any precinct, and that 173-vote gap alone accounted for more than half the overall deficit.

But those same voters gave newcomer Amy Beliveau her best result of any precinct, outpolling even top vote-getter Keri Layton (285 to 228).

Precinct 5 didn't vote as a bloc. It voted against spending and for new faces simultaneously.

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5) Precinct 3 was the yes coalition's anchor — and it wasn't enough.

The precinct delivered the strongest override support (59.2%), Prior's highest raw vote total (463) and Bellaire's widest margin (+82).

It's historically one of Winchester's most active precincts. But its 133-vote yes margin on the override couldn't offset Precinct 5's 173-vote no margin alone, let alone the deficits in Precincts 6, 7 and 8.

6) Michelle Prior's 71.2% in 2026 was a commanding Select Board win — but not as overwhelming as her 2023 landslide.

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Prior defeated challenger Shamus Brady with 71.2% of the vote, w
2,823 votes to 1,140 and carrying all eight precincts. Townwide, that

translated to a 42.5-point margin and a 1,683-vote advantage, making it one of the strongest recent Select Board performances in Winchester.

Still, it did not eclipse the scale of Prior's 2023 victory. In that race, she defeated Vincent Lawrence Dixon 1,224 to 199, taking 86.0% of the vote and winning by 72.0 percentage points. That earlier contest remains the more lopsided of the two.

So while Prior's 2026 result was emphatic, it was not her most dominant showing. That distinction still belongs to 2023, when she turned in a true landslide and set a benchmark that her 2026 reelection, impressive as it was, did not quite match.

7) Bellaire swept all eight precincts for School Committee — but his margins ranged from razor-thin to commanding.

Bellaire beat von Mering by just five votes in Precinct 4 (276-271) and by 14 in Precinct 5 (249-235), but ran away with Precinct 8 by 87 votes (224-137). His overall 54% is solid but not overwhelming.

8) The dormant middle of the electorate — roughly 10,000 registered voters — didn't show up even for the override.

Winchester has 15,115 registered voters. Election Day's 4,876 ballots mean more than 10,000 registered residents stayed home for a vote on an $11.5 million tax increase.

Even in the highest-turnout election in over a decade, two-thirds of the electorate sat it out. That silent majority is the backdrop against which every override margin — win or lose — should be read.

Will Dowd is a Massachusetts journalist who covers municipal govern
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NEWS

With override rejected, Winchester shifts from campaigning to budget planning

After Winchester voters rejected an $11.5 million Proposition 2 1/2 override on Election Day, March 21, the governing question in town has shifted from persuasion to arithmetic. Select Board member Bill McGonigle, who served on the Yes for Winchester campaign, said the defeat has changed how he approaches

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Voters fill Town Meeting seats across Winchester; four incumbents unseated

The biggest shakeup came in Precinct 7, where two officeholders lost in an 11-person contest, matching Precinct 4 for the busiest race.

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NEWS

Winchester's $11.5M override falls short; Prior returns to Select Board, Bellaire joins School Committee and Beliveau unseats Rossettos

The pattern broke. For seven straight votes stretching back to 2017, Winchester voters had said yes to every Proposition 2½ question put before them — school buildings, operating budgets, capital needs. The Lynch Elementary School project passed in 2023 with 82.4% support, the highest for any school ballot question in

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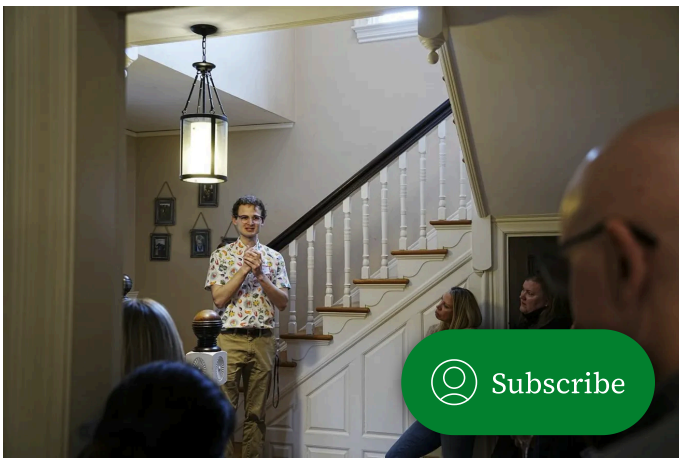

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NEWS

Winchester ZBA waives town regulations to move Washington/Swanton project along

Town officials have approved waivers of regulations for a residential/commercial development project at Washington and Swanton streets. The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) on March 19 approved the waivers for a 40B project at 278-292 Washington St. and 12 and 16-20 Swanton St. in a special meeting preceding a

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John Bellaire, 22, among youngest townwide winners in Winchester history

He won all eight precincts after a door-to-door campaign that emphasized direct voter contact over institutional backing.

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March 25, 2026

EVENTS

Network for Social Justice to celebrate 35th anniversary

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: The Network For Social Justice turns 35 this spring! There will be a celebration on Saturday, April 11, from 7-9:30 p.m., at the Sons of Italy, 117 Swanton St., Winchester. Connect with your local friends and neighbors as

March 25, 2026

EVENTS

Winchester Community Music School presents Jazz Jam Session

The following was submitted by the Winchester Community Music School: On Saturday, March 28, join the community at Winchester Community Music School, 407 Highland Ave., for a Jazz Jam Session, an afternoon of fun, spontaneous jazz playing, beginning at 3 p.m. Instrumentalists and vocalists of all skill levels are

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